

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Creation for Africa's Development Contexts

The call for renewed efforts to center African agency within African knowledge production shared in Cajetan Iheka's inaugural editorial (2023) continues to prompt reflection on existing scholarly endeavors, and determination to address marginalization within African Studies. This editorial extends some concurrent arguments linking knowledge production to Africa's development contexts. To stimulate debate, we reflect in this section on the following questions: Who benefits from the knowledge created by African Studies scholars? How do the important insights generated about Africa by African Studies scholars influence Africa's development?

The contours of Africa's contemporary economic, political, and social development contexts are being reshaped by both internal and external actors in ways that reflect shifts in the nature of economic and political engagement between Africa and non-Western actors in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and beyond. Scrutiny of these recent geopolitical and economic shifts has yet to take firm shape within African Studies scholarship, highlighting a need to generate fresh perspectives that strengthen the discipline's relevance for Africa's development realities. In a keynote address at the 2006 ASA Annual meeting, Amina Mama (2007) outlined why producing relevant knowledge about African contexts poses a number of ethical and epistemological dilemmas for scholars of African Studies, underscoring the necessity for an engaged African scholarship that is respectful of African struggles and is relevant to African lives and agendas.

The disarticulated nature of the production and dissemination of knowledge about Africa reflects enduring invisible and visible hierarchies that extend beyond race or color. Existing hierarchies have entangled with broader economic and socio-political disparities to produce the contested realities evident in the canon and the intellectual traditions valorized within the discipline. A seeming displacement of African scholarship away from its

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African center draws attention to some striking contradictions. Lamenting a so-called gentrification of African Studies, Haythem Guesmi (2018) parodies the illogicality of holding key African-themed academic meetings in distant venues not easily accessible to African scholars. Where external interests are prioritized in place of generating authentic insights into African realities, this brings into question the “ontological, ethical, and political rights” of those resident in the continent. High hopes abound that calls to decolonize African knowledge production (Zezeza 1997) can realize the desired transformative changes within dominant African, European, and US centers of learning, despite the slow pace of change. Addressing the barriers faced by African scholars in creating, disseminating, and accessing new knowledge and research findings about African societies is at the heart of a relevant and engaged African scholarship.

The new directions being charted within the restructured *African Studies Review* under Iheka’s guidance promise to address some of these challenges. Innovative initiatives have been introduced to engage African scholars on the continent and in the African diaspora in creating and disseminating relevant and impactful knowledge. Among these, the journal has taken steps to amplify the intellectual contributions of African thinkers and to highlight theories and ideas drawn from African experiences and epistemes. A regular feature in the journal will seek to rejuvenate and engage wider audiences with the scholarly contributions of these overlooked African authors. Additionally, several mentoring initiatives are underway to support African based scholars and early-career researchers in the creation, reviewing, and publishing of high-quality, relevant scholarly content. Furthermore, ASR is committed to showcasing underrepresented fields and topics within the broader range of humanistic work that encompasses African studies. Through its commitment to an interdisciplinary approach to African Studies, the *African Studies Review* reflects shared efforts to envision and foster a decolonial imagination that constructively engages with Africa’s realities.

Centering “African-ness” or “blackness” in African Studies, or conversely decentering “whiteness,” can be fraught with potential drawbacks. The undertaking calls for measured reflections on how whiteness and white scholars could contribute constructively toward anti-racist African histories and influence anti-racist African futures in a globalized world. In a tentative look at whiteness in the South African context, Neil Roos (2023) sketches out how white scholars within a social history of race and racisms might develop innovative work on whiteness closely situated to contemporary politics and decolonization. Fostering equitable research links between universities in Africa and the Global North to support the sustainable production of scientific knowledge about Africa can be of significant strategic impact to institutions and enhance their global reach. Redressing the complex power imbalances inherent in the production of knowledge about Africa requires mutual agency with respect to decisions about not only the study objectives but also research budgets, appropriate use of data, sharing of rewards, and the inclusion of African communities. A close examination of how dominant sites of knowledge

creation operate can broaden the understanding of how uneven patterns of knowledge production and dissemination are embedded and help redress the barriers to professional opportunities faced by African scholars.

Eminent African scholars exploring barriers to African agency recurrently debate the disconnect between external versus internal agency in addressing the conditions for Africa's development. Fantu Cheru's analysis of the local dimensions to global reform in Africa prioritizes the role of the state in his evaluation of governance and national versus regional strategies to address Africa's economic development obstacles (2017, 2002). To thrive and reduce its marginalization in a globalized world, Africa must enhance its governance, invest in education, prioritize African livelihoods, and address conflicts. Cheru's review of Africa's development imaginaries remains relevant in highlighting the internal and external influences on inclusive African development agendas. Similarly, Thandika Mkandawire (2011), an eminent African scholar of African development, in his LSE lecture on knowledge and the challenge of African development, deplored the disconnect between African and non-African scholarship of Africa, noting that "any student of Africa is confronted by two research communities that rarely interact. This shows up in the hiatus between the currency of topics and the datedness of the bibliography in African writing on the one hand, and the dated content and current biographies of 'Northern' writers on the other hand. A lot is lost in this gap." Mkandawire's argument that Africa's challenges in "catching up" with other regions requires that space be provided for self-agency and the emancipatory aspirations of Africans retains its relevance to date. His work underscores the necessity for intentionality, and for empowered, critical, and functional African university communities; this is an ongoing, long-term project.

The recent passing of Micere Mugo in June 2023 provides a timely opportunity to reflect upon two issues: first, the dearth of eminent, visible black female intellectuals in an academy characterized by white and male dominance, and second, the under-explored barriers to the advancement of young, black, female scholars within the discipline's pipeline. A renowned poet and literary scholar of Kenyan descent, Professor Micere Mugo was a strong advocate of a feminist African intellectual tradition (2012) whose work combined ideas of belonging and community known as *undugu* in Eastern Africa (Gathogo 2017) and as *utu* or *ubuntu* in Southern Africa. Wandia Njoya's reflection (2023) on Mugo's work suitably locates her views within political and historical contexts where actions by individuals are inextricably connected to other people and to society. When viewed through the paradigm of development ethics, ubuntu interprets development as an ethical or philosophical undertaking that operates on the moral logic of the common good (see Molefe 2019). Mugo's views on political agency through collective action are well articulated in the preface to her poetry collection (1994) where, when questioned on whether she should write poetry focused on non-political themes such as love, Mugo responds "... within the context of exploitation and powerlessness experienced by the majority in Africa..., love is a very political theme. I say, for the poor, there is no private space to even

engage in love making.” In a play coauthored with Ngugi wa Thiong’o (*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*), Mugo engaged with more than the struggles for African self-determination and addressed gender and class injustices and experiences.

Mugo’s work was informed by her African experiences and epistemes, which were evident in her strong presence and commitment to orature. Educated at Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Nairobi in Kenya, she settled in Zimbabwe between 1984 and 1992. Her period at the University of Zimbabwe coincided with that of another renowned female African intellectual, Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo. Mugo later held positions at Syracuse University and was Professor Emeritus of Literature, Oral Literature and Creative Writing in the Department of African American Studies (Jurado 2023). She is credibly characterized as a warrior scholar for her undimmed political, Pan-Africanist, and feminist activism (Eke 2023). In her tribute to Mugo, Ama Ata Aidoo celebrated Mugo’s progressive activism and outstanding achievements in detail, as captured within the excellent documentary by Ndirangu Wachanga (2023). Mugo was awarded a lifetime achievement award by the Royal African Society in 2012 and the Distinguished Africanist Award from the New York African Studies Association (NYASA) in 2007 (*Syracuse University News* 2007); she previously served as Chair of CODESRIA Scientific Committee (CODESRIA 2023). Her untimely passing in the same year as Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo—Aidoo died in May 2023 (Shaffi 2023)—marks a sad loss of two renowned feminist African intellectuals whose influence extends beyond the academy and across multiple countries in Africa and beyond.

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Africa’s development—in the present and future—requires a rigorous engagement with the past, including the colonial era. One understudied aspect of Africa’s past is how colonial economies responded to the introduction, standardization, and regulation of currencies across the continent. The latest issue of the ASR addresses this gap with a special forum about “Money for Africa and Money in Africa,” which features an introduction by guest editors Gerold Krozewski and Tinashe Nyamunda and five articles that explore the intersection of currencies, economies, and politics on the continent.

Toyomu Masaki’s opening article, “The Management of the Bank of Senegal and the Formation of a Colonial Economy, 1840s–1901,” examines monetary policies and processes in colonial Senegal with a focus on the Bank of Senegal, which issued banknotes and provided other financial services in the colony. Masaki’s scrutiny of the bank’s operations complicates the idea that control of the bank by Bordeaux-based merchants marginalized African

traders. Situating the bank as a site of political contestation, Masaki's article foregrounds the important role played by the bank in facilitating *métis* and African entrepreneurship and acquisition of property.

The agency of Africans in maneuvering colonial monetary policies designed to disfavor them emerges as a through line in the articles featured in the forum; in Tinashe Nyamunda and Admire Mseba's "Money in South-Central Africa, 1890–1931: Africans, Imperial Sterling, and Colonial Economy-Building," the subject takes center stage. Nyamunda and Mseba elucidate the difficulties that Africans in the South-Central African context faced accessing currencies and banking services, caught as they were between the competing interests of the British colonial state and the mining companies. Despite their economic disadvantages within the colonial economy, the authors show that African money users devised creative mechanisms for monetary exchange and for storing their savings in the face of persistent scarcity of specie.

Karin Pallaver's "From German East African Rupees to British East African Shillings in Tanganyika: The King and the Kaiser Side by Side" examines inter-imperial dynamics with respect to colonial currencies. Tracing the shift from rupees, which were widely used across East Africa, to shillings, Pallaver highlights how Africans, Indians, and Europeans used different currency denominations. Pallaver's article further buttresses the significance of the varying denominations used by the different racial groups in East Africa and the disparate impacts of monetary regulations and practices in the region. For Pallaver, "matters of colonial monetization and currency use, including the details of currency denominations, were interlocked with local, interregional, and imperial-colonial economic relationships, and constituted an essential part of the story of economy formation in the colonial context."

In "The Collapse of the Gold Standard in Africa: Money and Colonialism in the Interwar Period," Leigh Gardner centers African economies in the discussion of unstable colonial currencies during the interwar period. While the discourse has mostly focused on metropolitan experiences with the collapse of the gold standard, Gardner adjusts the angle of vision to three African contexts—The Gambia, Kenya, and Liberia—bringing Africa into the conversation on monetary policies and currency exchange in the period so as to demonstrate the difficulty that colonial policies faced amid global monetary instability and to highlight how Africans strategically took advantage of fluctuating exchange rates to maximize profit. Gardner's contribution illustrates the need to consider economies outside Europe in any comprehensive assessment of money in the interwar period.

Whereas Gardner's article focuses on The Gambia, Kenya, and Liberia, Maria Eugénia Mata attends to Portugal and its African colonies in "Reorganizing the Escudo Zone: Portuguese Monetary Policy and Empire-Union in Africa in the 1960s." Mata explains the process of reorganizing the Escudo Zone Monetary Union, comprising Portugal and its overseas colonies, as an attempt by Portugal to modernize its economy and foster integration with the

flourishing liberalizing economies in Western Europe. The goals of this reorganization failed to materialize. Mata's essay stresses the reasons for its failure, including the move toward political and economic independence in Lusophone Africa.

In addition to the special forum, this issue includes essays on collective action in South Africa, religious dynamics and conflicts in Ethiopia, the peacebuilding process in Côte d'Ivoire, and transitional justice in Rwanda. Contributing to the discourse on informality and infrastructural citizenship in Africa, Adam S. Harris, Andreas Scheba, and Louis Rice investigate the limited uptake of collective action among Cape Town's backyard residents in "Making Demands on Government: Theorizing Determinants of Backyard Residents' Collective Action in Cape Town, South Africa." The background to the study is the low rate of collective action among backyard residents, compared to other informal dwellers. Utilizing qualitative data from fieldwork in three neighborhoods in Cape Town, the authors analyze the factors that promote and/or discourage collective action among backyard residents, such as the diversity of residents, informal status, poverty, promise of a house, and the influence of charismatic leadership in the community.

The next three articles in the issue reassess conflicts in Africa. Terje Østebø's "Religious Dynamics and Conflicts in Contemporary Ethiopia: Expansion, Protection, and Reclaiming Space" sets out to recalibrate conceptions of inter-religious violence. Østebø challenges the dominant narrative that inter-religious violence in Ethiopia is a consequence of extremism. Arguing that extremism represents an inadequate conceptual and analytical tool, Østebø studies "developments and dynamics within each of the main religious communities in Ethiopia—Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Protestants," with clear attention to how they contribute to inter-religious violence. Conflictual factors, according to this author, cohere around the spatial practices of religious groups in Ethiopia.

As in Østebø's work, an interest in reorienting the study of conflict animates Line Kuppens and Arnim Langer's contribution, "'The Country Is on One Leg': An Analysis of Secondary Educated Youths' Perceptions of the Risks, Challenges, and Opportunities of the Peacebuilding Process in Côte d'Ivoire." Youth combatants often dominate scholarly discourse on African conflicts and peacebuilding integration programs. Kuppens and Langer extend the scholarship by turning to secondary school students for their perceptions of the peacebuilding process in Côte d'Ivoire. With data obtained from written essays from 905 students, the youth-centered study reveals general optimism about the peace process and the future of the country.

In the issue's final article, Zoë Elizabeth Berman's analytical lens is turned on young people in post-genocide Rwanda. Berman's "Ubunyarwanda and the Evolution of Transitional Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda: 'To Generalize is not Fresh'" is concerned with the intergenerational dynamics of transitional justice in Rwandan politics. Her study, which focuses on one youth group, Talented Youth United, shows how the group's members navigate the post-genocide inclination to forge Ubunyarwanda, that is, a

non-ethnic Rwandan identity. Berman concludes that the post-genocide generation formulates sharp political critiques despite the censorship of sensitive history and ethnicity. In her words, the young people “engage ubunyarwanda to build a more inclusive horizon of political possibility in Rwanda, playing with and reconfiguring an historically laden discourse to suit the political needs of the present.”

The interplay of historical discourse with the political needs of the present also guides Martin Klein’s scholarly review essay, discussing eight books in Ohio University Press’ “Africa in World History” series. In reviewing each book, Klein emphasizes the text’s contribution to understanding ordinary lives in Africa, its pedagogical value, and its significance for world history. Klein’s review essay is followed by book and film reviews highlighting the scholarly and artistic richness of the African studies corpus.

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